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ABSTRACT

National Education Goal Six calls for all schools to have safe environments conducive to teaching and learning by year 2000. In 1989, the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction initiated the School Security Enhancement Program, which provides competitive grants to school districts to develop or improve school-based security projects. During the 1991-93 biennium, the program was implemented in 15 districts across the state. This paper describes features of the program models and presents findings of a study that assessed their effectiveness. Interviews were conducted in May 1993 with 159 stakeholders at study sites (four large project sites and four small project sites) that had implemented school security programs. For each of the large sites, one high school and one middle school participated and for each small site, one high school was asked to participate. Individual participants included 19 school administrators, 21 security staff, 36 teachers, 15 custodians, 41 students, and 27 parents. Virtually all groups reported that the current school year was safer than the preceding year. A large percentage of the principals and teachers saw serious or moderate problems in trespassing, student possession of weapons, gang activities, robbery or theft, and verbal abuse of teachers. There was strong consensus among stakeholders that their program was needed. In comparison with a national survey of teachers, more Washington State teachers reported serious to moderate problems in six of eight areas, particularly robbery/theft, weapons possession, and racial tensions. It is recommended that program services be coordinated with "Omnibus Act" programs and that programs be designed within a conceptual framework that addresses the underlying causes of youth violence. (LMI)

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In Pursuit of Goal Six: A Statewide Initiative to Improve School Safety

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In Pursuit of Goal Six: A Statewide Initiative to Improve School Safety

Background

National Education Goal Six calls for all schools to have a safe environment conducive to teaching and learning by year 2000 (U.S. Department of Education, 1991). This goal is set against a backdrop of increasing youth violence and disruptive behavior on school campuses and in the community. For example, according to Department of Justice estimates, 2.2 million arrests of persons under age 18 were made in 1990, accounting for 16 percent of all arrests that year (U.S. Department of Justice, 1991; U.S. Department of Justice, 1992).

In its 1993 progress report (U.S. Department of Education, 1993), the U.S. Department of Education's Goal Six work group pointed out that in a large percentage of the nation's schools, violence and misbehavior seriously interfered with the education process, as reflected in the following statistics for 1991:

- 2 percent of teachers at all levels reported being physically attacked and 8 percent threatened with bodily harm in a 12-month period.
- 23 percent of eighth-graders admitted being involved in fights with another student in the previous semester and 12 percent expressed fear for their own safety in school.

Results of recent public polls are even more unsettling. For example, according to a poll conducted by *USA WEEKEND* in August 1993, fully 37 percent of students across the nation do not feel safe in school. Rising violence by and against youth has created a public perception that schools now resemble fortified bunkers instead of hallowed leaning institutions and that as a people we have grown so numb that alarming statistics on

violence no longer encourage us or move us to insist on change. The perception is particularly poignant in the face of mounting evidence that violence by and against youth can be understood, curbed and prevented (American Psychological Association, 1993).

In the state of Washington, data compiled by the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs showed a record high of 48,639 juvenile arrests in 1991, with a rate of 93 per 1,000 juveniles in the age range of 10-17. The nearly 3,000 arrests of juveniles for violent offenses in that year almost doubled the number reported in 1982.

A recently completed statewide survey (Einspruch & Pollard, 1992) showed that 25 percent of the students in the state of Washington had at some time carried a weapon (e.g., a gun, knife or club) to school. As many as 16 percent of the sixth-graders reported fighting that had resulted in injuries. At the secondary level, 19 percent of the eighth-graders, 16 percent of the tenth-graders, and 13 percent of the twelfth-graders reported similar altercations.

The Program

Against this backdrop of rising violence and disruptive behavior on school campuses, the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction initiated the School Security Enhancement Program in 1989. Funded under the Washington Omnibus Controlled Substance and Alcohol Abuse Act of 1989, the School Security Enhancement Program provides competitive grants to school districts to develop or enhance school-based security projects. Since its inception in 1989, the program has provided a variety of services in response to individual schools' needs. These services have included:

- supervision in school bus loading and unloading areas, hallways, school grounds, cafeterias, parking lots, and after-school functions;

- investigation of incidents of vandalism, theft, gang activity, drug activity, assault, and referrals to appropriate agencies; and
- development and maintenance of liaison with school district prevention/ intervention specialists, local police, children's services staff, juvenile justice, and other community-based organizations dealing with youth violence and drug abuse.

During the 1991-93 biennium the program was implemented in 15 local districts across the state, with a funding level of $3.2 million. A total of 75 security staff (with a full-time-equivalent count of 54.8) were supported by the program.

Service Delivery Models

Three service delivery models were developed or adopted by the participating districts to meet local needs. In the first model, the security guards were district employees hired specifically to provide school security. Typically, there were two security guards at each high school in the larger districts. Middle schools were each served by one security officer as were high schools in smaller districts. These security staff generally wore no uniforms and were unarmed. Each had the use of a two-way radio. One district used a variant of this model. Its security guards served as a districtwide staff, rotated to different schools throughout the school year, usually on a quarterly basis. This rotation model provided the flexibility of mobilizing staff across the district to deal with emergency situations as they arose. In this district, the security guards were in uniform and armed with handguns. Each had the use of a two-way radio and a district car while on duty.

In the second model, security services were provided by the city and county law enforcement officers through contractual arrangements with the district. These officers

were off-duty from the police department and the sheriff's office while they performed school security duties. While on school campus, they remained in their regular uniform and were armed. They also had the use of a marked police patrol car and a two-way radio. On any given day, a different police officer may be assigned to the high school or middle school.

In the third model, individual high schools were allocated funds to contract with the city police to receive supplementary security services, in addition to what the district-hired security staff provided. While the district staff were in plain clothes and unarmed, the police officers, off duty from their department, were in uniform and armed. They also had the use of a marked police patrol car and a two-way radio. In addition, they were authorized to make arrests on campus.

Staff Qualifications and Responsibilities

The security staff had at least a high school diploma. Several had some college education or a baccalaureate degree in criminal justice. Most had some law enforcement training and/or military experience. Some had held security-related jobs in the private sector. A few had up to 20 years of experience with police work. In some cases, the security guards were bilingual and had close ties with the community.

The security guards received on-the-job training, often with more experienced staff serving as mentors. In addition, they received inservice training through workshops and conferences provided by professional associations and law enforcement agencies.

In the larger districts, the staff consisted of individuals from a diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Also, there appeared to be a reasonable gender representation on the

staff. In smaller districts where a participating school was served by a single staff member, gender and cultural representation was obviously difficult to achieve.

In most cases, the security guards did not have an office on campus. In a few cases, they were assigned office space or shared an office with other school staff.

Well accepted by the school staff, the security guards were seen as an integral part of the school. They were able to establish rapport and a trustful relationship with the students who perceived them as friendly and helpful.

The primary responsibility of the security staff was to help create a school environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. This included dealing with incidents of vandalism, theft, gang activity, drug abuse and disruptive behavior. They generally worked during hours when school was in session (e.g., 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.). Typically they provided supervision in the following areas:

- School bus loading/unloading area
- Hallways
- School grounds
- Cafeterias
- Parking lots

The most frequently occurring security-related incidents were vandalism, theft, gang activity and disruptive behavior. A majority of the security staff conducted investigations of these security incidents at least once a week. In performing their duties, the security staff worked closely with the local police, children's services personnel, and the juvenile justice system.

Typically, students saw the security staff as non-threatening authority figures in whom they could confide. Many security staff had "informants" among students to warn them about security incidents (e.g., weapon possession, group fights) that might happen. The security staff were often able to anticipate and prevent the incidents.

Establishing rapport and gaining the trust of students were essential components of the repertoire in dealing with negative or criminal behavior. For example, knowing the students' names often helped prevent security incidents from occurring. It helped to talk with students as individuals in a non-judgmental way and helped them make intelligent decisions in crisis situations.

Program Impact

In an effort to assess the effects of the School Security Enhancement Program, structured interviews were conducted in May 1993 with a range of stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, students, parents, security staff, and custodians. The interviews were conducted by an external research team at four large project sites (with funding of $100,000 or more) and four small project sites (with funding under $100,000). These study sites were selected according to a set of criteria relating to location, project size, funding level, and project characteristics. For each of the large sites, one high school and one middle school were asked to participate in the study. For each of the small sites, one high school was asked to participate. Within each district, the selected schools were judged by the district program coordinator to be the most representative of the schools participating in the program.

Given the complexity of school safety issues, a large number of questions were relevant to the study. To keep the on-site interviews manageable, only a subset of questions was used with each stakeholder group. Questions were included for a particular stakeholder group when (a) the questions were most appropriate for that group and (b) the group was likely to provide the most valid and meaningful responses to the questions. Most of the interview questions were presented in a four-point Likert scale (e.g., serious, moderate, minor, not a problem). A total of 159 stakeholders participated in the interviews, including:

19 school administrators

21 security staff

36 teachers

15 custodians

41 students

27 parents

The interviews were conducted individually (e.g., school administrators and security staff) or in a small group setting (e.g., students, parents and teachers). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

As shown in Table 1, a majority of the students and teachers indicated that things were getting better in a range of security-related areas. Generally, the teachers' perceptions were more positive than those of their students.

Table 1 about here.

The principals were also highly positive about the program. Many indicated that the program freed up time (which otherwise would have been spent on discipline and security matters) for them to attend to curriculum and instruction issues and to provide instructional leadership at the schools. Assistant principals, in particular, reported a "night and day" difference resulting from the program. They felt that safety on campus had improved dramatically and they could now focus on instructional matters instead of disciplinary issues. The principal of a magnet school said that improved security had made it easier to attract students to its magnet activities because parents and the community perceived the school as safer than other schools in the area.

Most custodians reported a reduction in vandalism resulting from the presence of the security staff. Some parents indicated that, given the reduced level of altercations and violence on campus, school safety was no longer a major concern to them.

Virtually all stakeholder groups indicated that the current school year was safer than the preceding year, attributing the improvement to the program which allowed a more stringent enforcement of safety policies and procedures by the school administration.

Lingering Concerns

In spite of the improvement, concerns remained in a number of areas. As shown in Table 2, a large percentage of the principals and teachers saw serious or moderate problems in trespassing, student possession of weapons, gang activities on campus, robbery or theft, and verbal abuse of teachers. In addition, teachers also saw serious or moderate problems in racial tensions, vandalism of school property, trespassing, and physical conflicts among students.

Table 2 about here.

Program Continuation

There was a strong consensus that the participating schools needed the program. Many stakeholders foresaw serious consequences if the program were to be eliminated, including exodus of school staff and students, increased home-schooling, lowered staff morale, a dramatically increased level of gang activity and violence, and lowered student achievement. In the words of one administrator:

> *The choice is obvious: We pay now to keep schools from being overrun by the gangs or pay more later to deal with the chaos that results.*

One custodian put it succinctly:

> *If the program is dropped, teachers will spend more time walking the halls and administrators will spend more time dealing with discipline problems.*

Many teachers believed that without the program, the school administration would go back to the old way of simply reporting security and disciplinary incidents instead of dealing with them and preventing them.

A district administrator indicated that he would cut other school programs to fund the security program. A high school principal said he would reduce the teaching staff to support the security program, if no funding was available from the state. At one school, staff and parents favored cutting the athletics program to keep the security staff. At another school, parents would donate money and expect the PTA to raise funds to keep the security program.

Discussion

A recent survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 1991) provided information on teachers' perceptions on school safety issues. The survey included a national sample of 471 secondary teachers who responded to survey items similar to interview questions used in the present study. The national survey data provide a basis for making comparisons in several areas. As shown in Table 3, relatively more Washington teachers participating in the present study indicate serious or moderate problems in six of the eight areas. The differences in the areas of robbery or theft, possession of weapons, and racial tensions are especially conspicuous. On the other hand, fewer Washington teachers report that there are serious or moderate problems in physical conflicts among students and physical abuse of teachers.

Table 3 about here.

It should be noted that the districts and schools participating in the School Security Enhancement Program are not a representative sample of districts or schools in the state. If anything, they represent schools faced with a higher level of violence and destructive behavior than the average school in the state. Indeed, in many cases, these schools were confronted with deteriorating conditions when their districts applied for the state grant to enhance school security.

With the School Security Enhancement Program, the high-risk schools in Washington have taken but the first -- albeit significant -- steps towards becoming a "safe haven" for learning and teaching. Crime and violence on school campuses are often the result of conditions and practices not directly addressed by the program. Long-term, systemic

strategies for reducing the incidence of disruptive behavior must seek to nurture such protective factors as bonding to school, feeling successful, being committed to learning, having positive role models, adopting norms against deviant behavior, having parental and community support, and having access to alternative learning environments and job training opportunities.

Many of the "Omnibus Act" programs in Washington (Einspruch & Gabriel, 1993; Gabriel, et al., 1992; Weaver & Gabriel, 1992) share the common goal of reducing drug abuse and violence on school campuses. These program services should be coordinated (eventually integrated) to supplement and strengthen each other. Further, program development should be guided by a conceptual framework which addresses the underlying causes of youth violence (e.g., low self-esteem, disconnectedness, and a lack of alternative learning environments).

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Table 1

Percent of Students and Teachers Indicating Improvement in Security-Related Areas

Area	% Students	% Teachers
Gang involvement	56.1	100.0
Intrusion by non-students on campus	73.2	100.0
Security at school events	63.4	69.4
Level of violence at school	61.0	66.7
Weapons on campus	51.2	65.6

Table 2

Percent of Principals and Teachers Indicating Serious or Moderate Problems in Security-Related Areas

Area	% Teachers	% Principals
Gang activity on campus	64.7	50.0
Racial tensions	51.4	**
Student possession of weapons	45.7	50.0
Vandalism of school property	36.2	**
Verbal abuse of teachers	36.1	41.7
Robbery or theft of items over $10	44.1	50.0
Trespassing	22.3	58.4
Physical conflicts among students	19.4	**

** None of the principals indicated that there were serious or moderate problems in the respective areas.

Table 3

Percent of Teachers Indicating Serious or Moderate Problems in Selected Security-Related Areas

Area	Nation	Washington
Robbery or theft of items over $10	19	44
Vandalism of school property	30	36
Student possession of weapons	7	46
Trespassing	9	22
Verbal abuse of teachers	35	36
Racial tensions	19	51
Physical conflicts among students	23	19
Physical abuse of teachers	4	0